

Transcript of Opening Remarks delivered by Mr Tan Kiat How,
Senior Minister of State,
Ministry of Communications and Information,
At SCS Gala Dinner & Tech Leader Awards 2024 (10 May 2024)

Mr Sam Liew, President, Singapore Computer Society

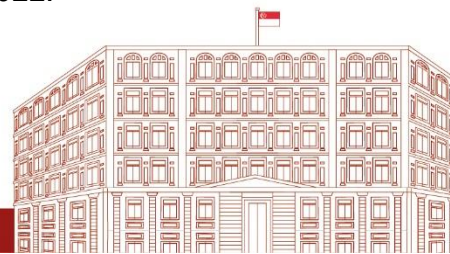
Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Colleagues and friends

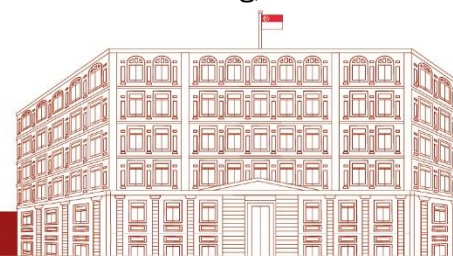
A very good evening

1. It is always wonderful to join all of you at the SCS Gala Dinner & Tech Leader Awards 2024.
2. This is a signature event in Singapore's tech sector calendar, bringing leaders and practitioners across industry and government, and many other stakeholders together to celebrate the industry's achievements and milestones.
3. Tonight, through the "Tech Leader Awards", we honor the individuals that have made a significant contribution to the sector.
4. I'm very glad that SCS's membership has grown to 56,000. Please give a round of applause to all of you. I'm also very happy that when I look across the room, I see a fair share of black hair, not just white hair. This is part of the renewal process and is really what sets SCS apart. This sense of camaraderie and purpose amongst all of you and its members. We may be competing against one another for deals and projects in the day, but tonight when we're here, we are comrades with a passion for technology, and a collective ambition to use tech to better the lives of fellow Singaporeans.
5. Since its formation 56 years ago, SCS has played an important role in raising the standards of **our tech workforce especially in areas of skills development, enabling innovation, and encouraging diversity.**
 - a. Today, SCS has 14 chapters and 5 special interest groups that allows its members to have a wide range of experience, exposures and opportunities. I think this is something that young members of SCS would have benefitted from this compared to those of us who joined SCS many years ago. I still have my membership card.
 - b. Beyond skills development, SCS has also championed important causes like getting more women to join the tech industry. Efforts as shared by Sam Liew include the 100 Women in Tech initiative that recognises the contributions of women leaders in tech and aims to inspire the next generation.
6. These are but a handful of initiatives that SCS has pursued and its contributions has allowed for our digital economy to grow.
 - a. Singapore's digital economy has generated S\$106 billion dollars' worth of value-add to the economy, which accounted for about 17% of our GDP in 2022.





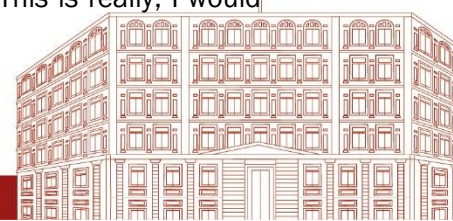
- b. It is growing well, with many exciting opportunities in the coming years. We see digitalisation across all sectors and markets, especially in Southeast Asia in this region, there are many exciting opportunities.
 - c. Today, we have about 210,000 tech professionals, a 4.7% increase over the last five years, with about 7 in 10 of them being locals.
 - d. It is not just more jobs, but we don't have enough people to fill the jobs. According to MOM's latest survey, there are about 7,000 job vacancies in the tech sector.
7. Looking ahead, **the digital economy outlook is positive**, notwithstanding recent headwinds that have affected the tech sector.
- a. We have seen layoffs in some organisations. It is a sobering reminder of the challenges ahead of us. But overall, the outlook is positive, the silver lining is in the skies ahead.
 - b. But there also some headwinds and some dark clouds that I thought I should mention tonight. Firstly, we have seen escalating geopolitical tensions, introducing new layers of complexity, impacting global supply chains and creating uncertainty in markets.
 - i. We see regulatory tensions arising between major markets like the US, the EU, and China around privacy, content, antitrust, and increasingly emerging technologies like AI.
 - c. For small, open economies like us, we get more concerned when the small yards get larger and the fences get higher. Domestically, we are living in a very different world from when SCS was founded 56 years ago. Today, everyone needs at least a basic knowledge of technology and digitalisation to be relevant to the job place and marketplace. Increasingly, everyone needs some basic digital skills to enable our daily living.
8. So what do we do from here? What are some of the roles that I think SCS can play to support Singapore as we take it forward?
9. We are getting a new chapter in Singapore's history. By next Thursday, we have a new Prime Minister, the new 4G Cabinet team. There are challenges ahead for the new leadership. As DPM Lawrence Wong has outlined in his Forward Singapore report, and the 4G team has articulated a vision of the refreshed social compact, one thing is clear: we need more partners and alliances to take Singapore forward and to make Singapore continue to be a vibrant red dot in this part of the world.
10. We look forward to partnerships like SCS. Find common cause with us, work on initiatives, and take the industry and Singapore forward. The government cannot do all these by ourselves. We have succeeded because of all the stakeholders who have taken ownership and work together to make it happen.
11. I thought I would share three areas that we hope SCS would continue to work with the government.
- a. First, continue to be an **advocate** for the tech industry. We have done well in almost doubling your membership from 2008 to where we are today. Continue to be a strong,





passionate advocate for the tech industry, reflecting the needs and challenges of the profession, and working with the government to identify areas that we can do better.

- b. But beyond just being a strong advocate, **take action**. Work together with us to implement programmes to uplift standards of tech professions and to take Singapore forward. I am very glad that SCS has over the years put resources and money where the mouth is, and it's a volunteer-driven organization. Many of you dedicated time, effort and contributed so much of your passion and energy starting chapters, special interest groups, and more importantly, inspiring the next generation. So, continue to take action and to work together with us.
- c. Thirdly, after being an advocate, taking action and recognising that we cannot do it alone, **form alliances**. I am very glad that SCS has taken a very progressive stance. Not just forming alliances with companies and partners in the tech ecosystem, it has reached out to non-tech associations to work together on shared projects to uplift digitalization across our economy. So, form alliances. I'm actually very glad that it's not just forming alliances with non-tech companies, but also bringing companies on board to make a real impact. And I use one example. There's a TeSA for ITE and Polytechnic Alliance, or TIP Alliance, which I work very closely with Sam as President of SCS, as well as Wai Meng, as President of SGTech.
 - i. So, what is TIP Alliance? It is about recognizing that ITE and Polytechnic graduates from our Infocomm and Digital Technology (IDT) courses have not been provided as much opportunities as our university graduates. We see the starting pay of a technology or Computer Science graduate from NUS, NTU, is probably around \$5,500 median pay and above. For polytechnic graduates, about \$2,500. Guess what is the starting pay of an ITE graduate from the computer science course? Less than \$2,000.
 - ii. Of course, different wages reflect different competencies and skill sets, experiences, and capabilities. But as we discuss among the Alliance members and companies, we observe that there are structural issues in the industry.
 - iii. Firstly, HR professionals and practitioners in many of our companies often rely on academic qualifications as not just the main, but sometimes the only criteria in assessing a job fit.
 - iv. Secondly, oftentimes we assess someone's competency primarily at this point of entry of a job but not the entire career.
 - v. And thirdly, we observe that there is not as many structured options pathways for Polytechnic and ITE graduates.
- d. So, in the true spirit of industry, both SCS and SGTech say that, yes, observations are good, but not just advocating, but also taking action and more importantly, forming alliances and bringing companies on board to make a difference.
- e. I'm very glad that through the leadership of SCS and SGTech, we started an Alliance on this to bring companies on board to look at more skills-based hiring. More than 200 companies have come on board, pledging to hire our ITE and polytechnic graduates, giving them a chance and supporting our work study program. This is really, I would





Ministry of Communications
and Information

An Engaged and Connected Singapore

say, the Singapore spirit – association members like all of you, companies, individuals,
taking action, and making a difference.

12. Thank you very much.

